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California First in Nation to Approve Fire-Safety Standard Protecting Mattresses Against Danger of Open Flames

New Law Takes Effect in 2005, Also Covers Futons

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SACRAMENTO – California has approved the nation's first standard requiring that mattresses, box springs and futons sold to consumers provide protection against an open flame causing the product to burn intensely.

The regulations go into effect Jan. 1, 2005, after which all mattresses, box springs and futons manufactured for sale to California consumers must be open-flame resistant. Candles, lighters and matches are common sources of open flames that set mattresses on fire.

Manufacturers are preparing to produce mattresses, box springs and futons that meet the new standard and the safer products will be increasingly available to consumers this year, prior to the law's enforcement date.

The new mattress flammability standard is called "Technical Bulletin 603." It was developed and will be enforced by the California Department of Consumer Affairs' Bureau of Home Furnishings and Thermal Insulation (BHFTI) per legislation signed into law in 2001.

"The state's approval of the Technical Bulletin 603 standard means Californians will have greater protection from the danger of bedroom fires that start with small open flames," said Lynn Morris, BHFTI chief. "It's an effective, achievable and economically sensible standard."

"Thanks to the hard work of our staff and the contribution of many others throughout the process, Technical Bulletin 603 continues California's legacy of leadership in home furnishings fire safety."

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Mattresses sold to Californians now meet the national flammability standard, which requires the product resist ignition from a smoldering-type fire caused by a cigarette. While improving safety, the national standard has not provided protection from open-flame-ignited fires. Statistics show open flames are a significant cause of mattress fires, related fire deaths and property loss.

When an open flame is applied to a mattress found in most homes, it quickly catches fire. Tests show that after just three minutes the mattress can be ablaze with deadly flames and the room filled with smoke.

Mattress fires can quickly lead to “flashover,” an intense, deadly fire throughout the room. California’s tough new standard is designed to prevent an intense mattress fire for a full 30 minutes, giving potential victims a life-saving window of escape time.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, fire injures 25,000 and kills 4,000 U.S. residents annually. Such fires often start in bedrooms. Nearly 1,000 lives are lost to fires that start in bedrooms. Over 800 children 9 or younger die in home fires nationally every year, often because they played with fire, with bedrooms a favorite location.

The California mattress flammability standard is the model for a similar proposed standard incorporated in recently introduced U.S. Senate legislation, the “American Home Fire Safety Act.” The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), which regulates bedding products nationally, is also developing a similar proposed national standard.

Last fall, BHFTI formally requested that the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) adopt the Technical Bulletin 603 standard as the nationwide standard. The bureau and CPSC have long cooperated on such standards development.

BHFTI is developing a related small-open-flame standard that will bring similar protection to mattress pads, comforters, pillows and other filled bedding products.

For more information, visit the Bureau Web site at www.bhfti.ca.gov.

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